

Handout Five Qualitative Interviewing “Story” Methods

Note: References are listed at the end of this handout for evaluation or research projects that used each of these approaches.

Most Significant Change [1]

Basic structure of the interview:

1. “Since you have participated in _____, what is the most significant change you have made in _____ [*usually related to how they do their jobs, how they use online health info, etc.*]
2. Why do you think this change is so significant?
3. Can you give an example of how this change has benefited you (or the organization, or the services you provide, etc.)

Example

Interview with a social worker who runs self-help classes through the Arthritis Foundation.

- *Since you added a “Searching for Online Health Information” session in your arthritis self-help curriculum, what is the most significant change you have seen among self-help participants?*

Answer: They come back to the classes and they seem to be very informed about the drugs they are taking, side effects, and alternative treatments. They’re teaching *me* things about the common arthritis drugs.

- *Why do you think this change so significant?*

Answer: In Arthritis Self-Help, we try to teach people to make good decisions about their lifestyles and treatments and I think MedlinePlus is one more tool to help them make decisions. Arthritis is a very complicated illness to treat and the treatments can have bad side effects. They have to decide -- is the cure worse than the disease?

- *Give an example of how this change has benefited someone in your self-help groups?*

Answer: One man has a sister-in-law that really pushes alternative treatments. He would try them from time to time if they didn’t cost too much. Now he researches them on MedlinePlus. I know he found one he shouldn’t take because of another health condition he has.

Expanding the Structure

- You can ask about changes for other types of clients or stakeholders. In the example above, you might ask “What are some changes you’ve seen related to how the workshop facilitators teach since they received training on MedlinePlus?”
 - You can extend the interview to get specific feedback about your project. For instance, in the example above, you could ask what worked well with the training, what could be done better, etc.
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Critical Incident Technique [2]

Basic structure of the interview:

1. Describe a very successful experience you had ...
2. What did you or others do to make it successful? What was the outcome?
3. Now think of a very unsuccessful experience you had...
4. What made it so unsuccessful? What was the outcome?

Example

1. *Describe a very successful experience you had doing health information outreach.*

Answer: We partnered with a faith-based agency that organizes volunteer community health workers to help people in their communities find quality health information online. This organization serves very rural, medically underserved counties with few social service agencies to support them. They felt anxious about finding general health information until we showed them MedlinePlus.

2. *What made this outreach project so successful? What was the outcome?*

Answer: The community health workers really needed access to online health information and were very motivated to learn it. We also had a librarian who was able to build rapport with the CHWs, so they were comfortable calling her for help when they needed it. The outcome was that the CHWs said they used MedlinePlus more than once a week to help people in their communities. They also taught others to use it. One CHW taught her minister’s wife, who now uses it with parishioners.

3. *Now think of a very unsuccessful experience you had doing health information outreach in LRGV*

Answer: We set up a computer in the waiting room of a clinic that served low-income patients. Our librarians come to the clinic a few hours a week to help residents get online health information, but they seldom had anyone come by for information.

4. *What made it so unsuccessful? What were the outcomes*

Answer: The main problem was that the patients didn't come to the clinic until they were in a medical crisis. They were not in a place to sit down with a stranger and look up medical information. The doctors also were not about to send a patient in crisis to our librarians. Our general outcome was that we helped very few patients and the librarians felt like they were wasting time.

Expanding the structure

- Probes for more reasons the examples worked or didn't work: There probably are more than one or two reasons something was successful or unsuccessful.
- Ask about lessons learned: what would the interviewee do (or do differently) in the future? What advice does the interviewee have for others regarding the interview topic?

The Colonias Project Method [3]

Basic structure of the interview:

1. Give an example of...
2. What was the outcome of that incident?

Example

1. *Give an example of how you helped someone get information from MedlinePlus en español last week. What kind of information did you help them get?*

Answer: A lady wanted information on heart pacemakers. Her mother was going to get one the next week and this lady and her mother were very nervous. This lady and I watched the MedlinePlus tutorial and I printed out the information for her to take home.

2. *How did the information help this person or what did the person do as a result of getting this information?*

Answer: The tutorial helped the lady realize that this was a pretty minor surgery. She said her mother would be happy to know she would not have to go “under” anesthesia and would probably not have to stay all night. This lady seemed really relieved when she left!

Expanding the structure

- Ask what they would have done before learning about the resource. For example, how did they get health information before learning about MedlinePlus?
- Did the information help them make a decision or change their mind about something (like getting treatment, getting a second opinion, etc.)?
- How has the resource helped them personally or in fulfilling their work role?
- Describe any problems or barriers they had finding information
- Ask for suggestions for improving the program, product, etc.

Appreciative Inquiry Interviews [4]

Basic structure:

1. Think about your experiences with_____ and describe a peak or exceptional experience
2. What did you value most about that experience?
3. If you had three wishes about... that would make experiences like this exceptional most of the time, what would they be?

Example

1. *Think about the community-based partners in the different community projects that your office has conducted. Describe an exceptional partnership.*

Answer: When we worked with the Mental Health Outreach agency, everything went smoothly. The executive director had a vision about how health information outreach could benefit the clients of her agency. The liaison she assigned to work with us was very responsive and, most importantly, stayed with the project the entire 18 months. The liaison was

very creative in finding ways to fit health information outreach into the agency's programs and services.

2. *What did you value most about the experience?*

Answer: We really felt we were making a contribution to this agency's mission. The staff really acted as though they wanted us there and wanted to work with us. Also, we truly built a relationship with the liaison.

3. If you had three wishes for all partnerships your organization formed with community-based organizations, what would they be?

Answer: First, I wish that we could form partnerships with executive directors who see a need for our outreach efforts –who see how our efforts support their mission. Second, I wish executive directors would communicate to staff that our outreach efforts are important and should be supported. Third, I wish the CBOs would assign liaisons that really want to work with us and can manage including our project into his or her workload.

Expanding the structure

- This may *seem* like half of the critical-incident interview, but appreciative inquiry data collection focuses on the positive aspects of the past and present and on desired future outcomes. Therefore, the interviewer must know how to help interviewee's reframe their complaints and express the changes they would like to see.
- This approach seems particularly useful for planning, visioning, and setting goals. It would be a good technique to use with advisory groups.

Resources

1. Dart J, Davies R, A Dialogical, Story-Based Evaluation Tool: The Most Significant Change Technique, American Journal of Evaluation 2003 June; 24(2): 137 - 155.
2. Lindberg, D.A.B., Siegel, E.R., Rapp, B.A., Wallingford, K.T., and Wilson, S.R.: Use of Medline by physicians for clinical problem solving. Journal of the American Medical Association, June 23/30 1993, 269(4), 3124-3129.
3. Olney CA, Warner DG, Reynan G ,Wood FB, Seigel ER MedlinePlus and the Challenge of Low Health Literacy: Findings from the Colonias Project, Journal of the Medical Library Association, J Med Libr Assoc 2007 Jan; 95 (1), 31-39.
4. Preskill H, Catsambas TT. Reframing Evaluation through Appreciative Inquiry. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006.